COLOMBO, RENA

56

Interview of

Rena Colombo wife of

Benjamin de Cruz Colombo

who worked as a

gardner under Mr. Tom

Fenton, Supervisor

year 1940-1945

also photos

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Agnes Colombo
Name of narrator

1900 Franklin Canyon Rd
Address of narrator
Martinez Ca. 94553

Eleanor Sweet
Name of interviewer

One King Dr.
Piedmont 94611
Address of interviewer

2-23-83
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Dunsmuir House & Gardens
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Rena Colombo
1900 Franklin Canyon Rd
Martinez Ca. 94553

3-23-82
Date

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COLOMBO, Rena
(Dupl. TRANSCRIPT) -tape 56-

# Bunsmuir House History

RENA COLOMBO

1900 Franklin Canyon Road
Martinez, CA

March 23, 1983

Interviewer: Eleanor Swent
One King Av., Piedmont

COPY

Q: Tell us when you lived at Dunsmuir.
R.C. My husband was employed as a common gardener in the beginning. His name was Benjamin D. Colombo, and he was very happy there, and the work was very satisfactory, so when Mr. Thomas Fenton left -- he was the head gardener at that time -- Mrs. Hellmann asked Mr. Colombo to replace Mr. Fenton. And then we had to move up on the property, as the head caretakers, to take care of the place, day and night.
Before that, we lived on Washington Avenue, in San Leandro. we bought our own little home.

Q: Were you sad to move?

R.C. No, the garden got too small for me. At home. And when it was all planted, I said, there's no more here, I can't stay here, I've got to go somewhere else.
Q: You also are a gardener.

R.C. Oh, yes. I love it. So we moved up there to the caretaker's cottage, which was near the gate. At that time there was nothing no gate there. And people would drive in and drive out. But we were always alerted and knew when somebody would come in.
Q: How did people get up there? Cars? Buses?

R.C. Cars, just cars. And of course there were a lot of limousines, a lot of guests. And Mrs. Hellmann would have her mah jong game on the front porch and she'd have four or five of her friends, they all came with their chauufeurs and played their gaME, and then they left before dinner.

Q: What was the year when you moved there?

R.C. Thirty -- forty-four. (This must be an error. I think she meant thirty-four.)

Q: This was during the war then?
R.C. Oh, yes.
Q: And they were still playing mah jong? I didn't realize people played it then.
R.C. Oh, yes. And then once a year they would have a picnic for their employees from the Wells FArgo Bank/. They'd come in Greyhound buses and then the chef and all the help would have to help and prepare the grounds. They'd have a ball game

and some went swimming. Others, they had a portable dance floor and orchestra.

Q: What time of year was this?
R.C. That was in August. Once a year they had that big barbecue, all day long. All the beer they wanted to drink, and food. A big affair! (Laughs).
Q: Lots of work, both before and after.
R.C. Oh, you'd better believe it. But she was really nice. She was a real sweetheart. Very considerate. She'd always say "There's plenty to eat, nothing to waste. Nothing to waste." If you can't use it, send it down to the village so that people can use it.
Q: That was San Leandro, the village?

R.C. San Leandro, the village.

Q: You shared in your husband's work then?
R.C. I did, and I helped one summer, assisted the butler in the dining room. I always wanted to have a chance and see how those people lived and I'm glad I did. I always wondered how the very wealthy people lived and everything, and when I stayed there that summer, I said, I had it. No way would I like to live that way. That was about a month, I said, I've had it. They don't have a life of their own. I'm so much richer and happier. Because I don't have to do anything that she had to do. There were times that the poor woman had to change three or four times a day. There'd be guests from here, and then she'd have to go there, and then she'd have somebody else coming, and she'd be so tired, she said, "Mrs. Colombo, I would just love to go to bed and rest, but I can't."

There'd be some orchestra that was playing, I think a Hungarian group, and she had them to the house after the music, to entertain for dinner. But she wouldn't be with them. She'd have a dinner for them, and the butler would serve the dinner but she woldn't be there. But it's not a life that's free.

Q: Did they enjoy the gardens?
R.C. Oh, yes.

Q: Your husband had been working there for a long time before he became head gardener?

R.C. Oh yes, so she felt that he knew his work well enough to have him run the place. And she said, "I've had a lot of gardeners," (which she did. Mr. Fenton I think was an English gardener.) And she said, "I've never had one as honest as you, Ben."

Because we raised about 300 baby chicks a year. That was for the family. They were there just maybe a m,onth during the summer. The rest of the time they were in San FRancisco and stayed there. And then twice a week, the truck would take the vegetables and the eggs to the city. That was for the Dinkelspiels' home and for the Hellmanns.

Q: So the gardener also had to help raise the chickens?
R.C. Well, there was about five men that my husband had to manage, and assign different jobs.
Q: When they went to San FRancisco, how did they go? By ferry? Because the bridge wasn't built then.
R.C. No. I don't know how. My husband didn't go, he sent one of the men, Johnny Ornellas. He was Portuguese, and we are too. I was born in Europe. I was two years old when I left there. I went back to see my country in 1947, and I've been going ever since. I'm planning another trip now, this summer, in July.

Q: Do you still have relatives there?
R.C. No, not now, but I did at that time. But I always said I wanted to go and see where I was born. And I did, where I was baptized, the little church in the village where I was born. My husband was from a little village about ten miles from where I was born. And he was born there too. And we were neighbors. And then they moved to Lower Hayward, and we stayed where we were, and we didn't get to meet until I was about 15 and he was 17. And we were married when I was 17 and he was 19. He was working for Avencino-Mortenson, that was a big nursery that was there in San Lorenzo. It's no longer there. And so he had lots of experience, with flower gardens and roses that they grew for shipment.

Q: In this picture, there are two men --
R.C.: One has a hat, and one has a cap. The one with the cap is my husband, on the left, holding the flowers. The one with the hat is Albert Bonfonte.

Q: Is this the way he would be dressed for work?
R.C. Yes.
Q: It looks like a suit.
R.C. No, it's just a jacket and a hat.
Q: A regular felt hat, and your husband is wearing a T-shirt.
R.C. A T-shirt. It was in the summer, when the chrysanthemums were blooming.
Q: I've never seen such huge mums! They're enormous; the stems are about three feet long.
R.C. That was in a sort of sheltered house, so that the rain wouldn't get in. A frame house, yes.
Q: One of the things was to ask you about these pictures. This one was taken in 1908. There's a round building --
R.C. That was the aviary.
Q: This round building with the little peaked roof, was the aviary? Did they have a lot of birds?
R.C. They had pheasants and quail, live birds.
Q: What was the purpose? Just to enjoy them?
R.C. Just to have bi rds there. And she also loved horses. She would have the gardener have the horses pass in front of the house, after ten o'clock in the morning, when she would have all her letters, her correspondence, done, and the horses would have their hooves on the pavement, and she enjoyed the noise of the horses' hooves, and that's the only reason that they had the horses! For the country atmosphere.

Q: Did they eat the birds?
R.C. No.
Q: And they weren't singing birds.
R.C. Quail make a little noise, and the pheasants.
Q: There is another little building here that they wondered about too.
R.C. That wasn't there. It's not the conservatory; that was near the greenhouses.
Q: In this other picture, of the baby in the wicxker carriage that is the aviary behind there?
R.C. Yes, that's the aviary.

Q: And here's a picture of the house, and the aviary again?
R.C. Yes, that's the aviary.
Q: These were taken in 1906 and 1908.
R.C. Iwasn't even born then!
Q: This is a larger picture, not dated. Is this the aviary also?
R.C. No. That's real early.
Q: And this is your daughter's picture?
What a lovelyt place to spend her childhood! Did she enjoy it?
R.C. Oh yes, she had a grand time.
Q: I have a map here --
R.C. Now these are the horses, and they were really large draft horses, huge horses. And they just pulled the wagon to -- maybe there'd be some long trimmings or something to be picked up. But they had a truck also that could have done the same work. Mrs. Hellmann enjoyed the sound of the horses around the house -- but not before ten o±clock in the morning! So it wouldn't disturb her. That time was when she could hear the horses and enjoy them/.
Q: What was the procedure for getting a job there? How would you go about that?
R.C. You'd have to be recommended. At that time, jobs were very scarce too. It was during the depression, and it was very difficult. In the thirties. Ben applied. He went and applied for a job and talked to Mr. Fenton, and he said, "Well, I',m getting ready to retire in a short time. I want to get through with this; I've worked long enough. But I'll hire you as a gardener." And evidently they felt that he --- well, he liked gardening, and loved the outdoors. And he worked long hours. (She is talking about Ben now.) And at night we would go through the grounds to see if there was any vandalism, which there would be sometimes. And the deer would come in.

And one night, to have fun, we went up by the Dinkelspiel's house. They had an espaliered orchard of pear trees, and there was a fawn and the mother. And my husband said, "Watch! I'm going to get that little deer!" He says, "You keep the light on it while I get up close to it." And I did, I kept the light, and the little deer was just so astonished , you know he could see the light getting bigger and bigger, and then Ben grabbed him, and he went "AArgh!" and he kicked, and Ben dropped him, and he said, "I just wanted to show you that I could catch a deer!" (Laughs.)

They did a lot of damage; they were very destructive. They had high fences to keep the flowers from being chewed up.

Now, the last time I was there, there was a row of trees that went up way along the driveway, and they were all cut down. Somebody went in there and cut those trees down! Way after we were gone. I think between the time that the ½place was turning into a --. They were boxelders. And they were huge trees. And they made a nice shade along the road. And then they had the ivy on the other side where the creek is, and that had to be trimmed back every year, and it was neatly groomed.

Then at night, in the evening, the quail would come. And we bought quail feed to keep the quail, just to keep the quail around there. And one day my husband said, "I'm going to catch a quail." And I said, "We are?" He said "Yup," so I says, "Okay." So we fixed a little trap, and he caught four quail. He says, "Now you have to dress them." I said, "Not me! You caught 'em, you dress 'em." And we had to let 'em go! No way, they were so cute. I just love the outdoors.

And Albert had a little boy that was three years old. Young Albert. They lived maybe about four blocks away from there. They could walk from the place if they wanted to. And his father worked there, Mr. Bonfonte. And Albert's wife would pick him up every evening, and bring little Albert with them. My husband would talk to him and say, "Albert, you'd better put rocks in your pocket. See those big hawks?" There were lots of big hawks flying around. He'd say, "You see those big hawks there? If you don't put rocks in your pocket, they're going to pick you up and carry you away!" Poor little guy, he'd go around picking up rocks, and his father, when he got ready to go home, hesays, "What's the matter with you? What do you have rocks in your pocket for?" "Well, he says, "Mr. Colombo told me if I didn't fill my pockets with rocks, the hawks would pick me up!"

He was a lot of fun. My husband was a great tease. He loved life, and loved to tease. I had a niece that came over, and they put their trailer in back of the house here, and he said, "Rene, you have to sit in the trailer tonight, and the owls are going to come down and pick all the meat off your bones. before morning." And she'd lookat me, as if to say, "That isn't true, is it?" And she'd be so happy

that it wasn't true. But he was just a big tease. And they all loved him because he was lots of fun. He was always doing something.
Q: Can you reconstruct a typical day?
R.C. We started at eight o'clock in the morning, and they'd have an hour for lunch, and go home at five.
Q: What did you do first thing in the morning?
R.C. They'd probably, if it was the summer time, water, get the plants watered. And they had beds with boards along the side, where they had beds of flowers. They were a little bit raised, and each bed would have different types of flowers for cutting. Mostly for cut flowers. Bachelor buttons, diffferent colors, zinnias, dahlias, gladiolas, and in the morning we'd have to get up when the dahlias were in bloom and hunt the Japanese beetles. They'd cut holes in them and they weren't fit for the house if they weren't perfect. We picked them off by hand. They fly, and there's no spray, you couldn't control them.

And then different ones had different chores in different sections of the garden.
Q: The flowers were sent to the homes in San Francisco as well as the one here?
R.C. When they were here, it was just for the ones here. And they were changed twice a week. Fresh flowers. And they were fixed in the back porch; they had a big back porch. The butler and my husband did the arranging. When they were in the city, we sent flowers there. Year round, oh yes!

And when they had baby chicks, we had to take care of them at night, and watch the brooders so that they wouldn't smother, and had to feed them. And then they'd go into the big hen house. I don't think that's even there now, the hen house. And we'd send about 200 dozen of eggs to the city. That'd be for the whole family. Ther'd be for Frederic, for Marco, for Lawrence, and Mrs. Hellmann. Of course they had a big household. A big crew that did all the work, so they fed them all.
Q: Obviously, it was a 24-hour job that you had, wasn't it?
R.C. It was, when you're in charge, you have to see that everything was going perfectly.

Q: Did you ever take holidays?

R.C. No, no, we were so happy there, it didn't matter. We didn't care for holidays. And after we moved here it was the same thing. We operated a nursery here for years and years, and we were happy. Until we were able to hire someone to relieve us, and then we started to take a little time off. But we're just happy working people, you know, and it's been great. (Laughs.)

Q: About the flowers -- did they have roses at all?
R.C. They had a rose garden, and most of them were up around the Dinkelspiel house. They had them in the garden. They had tree roses near the front of the houses. But not for cutting. Dahlias, yes, and gladiolas.
Q; Have the fashions changed in flowers? Were there flowers then that you just don't see plamnted now?
R.C. They had flowers there that you don't see anywhere, and you can see them in the Fioli (sic) gardens across the Bay. And that's the elstromaria, the Peruvian lili. They are beautiful; they hold up in water just beautiful. They come in salmoin, pink, light pink, and they're like the little baby amaryllis, small, and in a cluster. There are lots of little lillies together in a clump, on a head, like. Something like your agapanthus, that type of flower. And you don't see those out of the estates. And they were very easily grown.
Q: Did they bring them from Peru, do you think?
R.C. I believe so. The common name for them is Peruvian lily.
Q: Did your husband make decisions about the planting, or did Mrs. Hellmann?
R.C. She would say, "It's time to buy the bulbs; get so many." And they would get bulbs by the hundreds. Daffodils, and what else? Tulips. The parrot tulips. And you'd have to have beds of them. And of course they looked beautiful in the garden, and then they'd pick them for the house, ?And they also had the lake there they had water lilies. And a little boat to go out and pick the water lilies for the dining room table. That was nice.

Q: What about blossoms/ Were there fruit trees, cherry blossoms?
R.C. No.
Q: Camellias?
R.C. No.
Q: Rhododendrons?
R.C. Under a big oak. In front of the house, they had rhododendreons there. And they had a huge oak tree. I don't think it's there now.
Q: Azaleas?
R.C. No. Azaleas are not for cutting.

Q: On the map, here is the entrance now, and here's a gate house. The freeway comes along here. Now you said tyou lived by the back gate.
R.C. We lived near the carriage house.
Q: Is the house still there?
R.C. No, the house burnt. And it was finished just like the carriage house, shingles. It was a little house with a front porch, all screened in.
Q: You mentioned a back entrance.
R.C. That was by the Dinkelspiel's house, there was a big heavy iron gate there.
Q: This was the main gate here?
R.C. Yes.
Q: And this was the coal shed?
R.C. Yes. And when we were there, they had a little corral for the horses, where they kept the horses, right by the carriage house. And toward the back too, the horses had a run.
Q: So when people came, to visit, they came in here and drove up this drive, and went past the carriage house. Was there a gate that had to be opened?
R.C. No. There was no gate there at that time.
Q; Did anyone live in the carriage house or the gate house?
R.C. No. Only in the summer time, the chauffeur lived upstairs in the carriage house.
Q: So the gate house was really an ornament?
R.C. Uh-huh.

Q: And then they came by the dairy barn.±
R.C. There was no dairy barn there; that was from an earlier time. But the poultry houses, now that was there. A big poultry house. It was huge. I think they bought about 300 chicks, you figure the cockerels and those that wouldn't make it, so they had about 200 laying hens. And of course they don't always lay, so that those that did lay, -- and when they had a surplus of eggs, we'd sell them to the grocery store. And my husband always turned in the money. And that's why she said he was so honest. Because not everybody had turned in the egg money. Although it's a minor thing, you know, but nevertheless he felt it wasn't his. He was really sincere in his job, and he didn't want to do anything that wouldn't be right.
Q: I suppose they ate the chickens too?
R.C. No. They were just for laying.
Q: Is this where the boxelder trees were, here? In front of the dairy barn?
R.C. Yes along through here.
Q: So you wouldn't really see those buildings if you were driving in?
R.C. Well, the trees were tall, big high trunks, but someone got in there and sawed them off. Because I was there about four years ago, for the tour, and it's nothing like it was. I was disappointed. The conservatory isn't there, and the green houses, and then they had also a little round, a little shed, that had a little bench where they grew indoor pots, and most of it was shinzanthus, or poor man's orchids, pink and lavender, and cinnerarias, we grew a lot of cinnerarias for decorating the house, and that's where they had a potting shed, and the greenhouses, that's where all that work was done.
Q: And you say that is gone?
R.C. Yes, and the conservatory's gone. It was large, and it had a lot of cactuc, night-blooming cereus, great big white cactus, and different ferns and things like that in the conservatory. And that was just for people to admire the plants, and it went with the grounds to keep the grounds interesting.
Q: Did Mrs. Hellmann go through the conservatory?
R.C. Not very often. I never did see her down there. But she knew it was there, and it had to be kept nice.

In fact, it had to be, new gflass had to be put on when my husband went there. And he had to hire extra men to get the glass put on. Because the men that had their regular jobs didn't have time for that. By the time they trimmed the lawn and shrubbery and watered, that's all they could do. It was all done by hand. They had little power mowers, but you had to walk behind them. Nothing that you could sit down and ride.

Q: How large was the conservatory?
R.C. It was about 50 feet long. And it had the entrance in the center, and the gables going in the opposite direction. And at the door, it had a little bridge that you'd go from the road, walk over the bridge to the front door of the conservatory. And it was all glass, and they had a little heating plant to keep the things from freezing in the winter.
Q: And your husband had to check it all the time to keep the right temperature?
R.C. Yes, that's right.
Q: ANd in the summer, did they cool anything?
R.C. If it was hot, they'd have to spray the plants to keep them from burning up.
Q: Now here it says grotto. What is that?
R.C. We just had the greenhouses. and the potting shed when we were there. And the heating plant.
Q: WEre these gardens up here? There's another back road, a sort of service road maybe?
R.C. That went around in back of the house. And there's the swimming pool. There was a road that went up by the swimming pool. It was a big pool, 50 or 60 feet long, and wide. The children used it. There was a bath house for changing. There was a marble statue, and up here there was croquet grounds.
Q: Did they use that?
R.C. No, there were too many things to do, but it had to be clipped and trimmed in case they wanted to play. (Laughs.)
R.C. Down through here there was lawn and trees, different types of trees. They had a big willow tree here.
Q: That's in the oval area between the swimming pool and this lower road.
R.C. There's kind of a little hill there, and there was a big willow tree there.

Q: And all the flowers were in beds?
R.C. Yes. All the cut flowers and blooming flowers were all down in here (around the bunkhouse) where there was shade. The bunkhouse wasn't here. (East of the road, where it says bunkhouse on the map).
Behind, there was trees and shrubbery, different types of greenery just to cover the hill. If it got too large, they had to cut it back.
Q: Here it says playhouse.
R.C. That little playhouse is now my chicken house. We had it here, for a long time, and the children that came into the nursery would play in that playhouse. Mrs. Hellmann said to give it to Audrey because the children don't use it any longer, so we moved it up in back of the cottage where we were living. And after we moved there, she said they didn't want it any longer, you could have it, so we brought it with us. And that little house was put on a truck for the walnut festival in Walnut Creek, it was all decorated with flowers and everything, and was in the parade quite a few times, and then we set it in front of our house when Audrey was little. And people would bring their children over, and the children just loved it. They played in it, and just had a grand time. They'd all say, "Let's go to the nursery where the doll house is. We want to play in the doll house!"

So the parents would bring them out. And when they outgrew that, it was kind of deteriorating a little bit, so I kind of fixed it over a little bit, and had a man fix it over a little bit, and moved it and made it into a little chicken house, so we still have that! My chickens have the fanciest house in California! (Laughs)

R.C. Oh, hgere's the pond!
Q: It says gazebo and fountain.,
R.C. I don't remember the fountain. But the pond, they raised the water lilies in that pond, and had the little boat that they'd go out in to pick the water lilies. Different colors. And they were beautiful.

Q: What kind of planting was around there?
R.C. Vines, different vines. And trees. Some were ground vines, and some were tall shrubs. I have one here that we brought, a cutting. After we left there, Mr. Gomes was the head caretaker. And my husband was out here in the nursery, and we'd go and visit them, because he enjoyed going there, so he said, can we have a little cutting off that vine there? And it was near where the doll house was. It has a little blossom that's very fragrant, and it's a variegatred vine, and I don't know the name of it., And I planted it, and it's growing out here.

And I have the variegated aurelia that he gave him, just some cuttings, trimmings that he would normally throw away anyhow, and I've got those growing back here. And I don't think they even have them growing there now. But they're welcome to some cuttings if they'd like. Because in front of the house was a huge oak tree, and under the oak tree they had the rhododendrons and these variegated aurelias. And it was very very pretty.

That tree is gone. We had the tree people come and treat it every year. That oak must have been planted when they built the house, or maybe before that. So it was all wired to keep it from snapping off. Davey Tree SErvice, they'd go there once a year and take care of it.

End of side A

Tape I-B

Q: Probably most of the work, your husband and the helpers did there?
R.C. Yes, unless there was something that had to be repaired, that wasn't part of the daily job. They'd have people that came in for instance if the swimming pool had to be fixed.

R.C. It was a big job, but it was fun, it was nice. They got along so well.
Q: How long was he there?
R.C. I guess about four years, and then he went to work for the Maritime. They wanted people to work during the war. And then after the war we moved to Hayward and he and I took a trip then to Europe and we took our little girl with us too. And then after that we moved up here, to where we are now.

Q: Did they use the pond for anything?
R.C. Just to raise the water lilies. They had a little boat about 12 or 15 feet long, two people could get in it to get the lilies.
Q: Now you come along here and it says "arbor."
R.C. And this is where the orchard was, below and west of the Dinkelspiel house. And my husband took care of that tooo Mostly pears. No other fruits that I know of. Oh, she enjoyed those little wild strawberries. Baron Soulmatcher is the name. And they produce a small red strawberry and they smell of pineapple. They are so strong, they're just delicious. So we had to raise those little strawberries for Mrs. Hellmann, because she loved them.
Q: She had good taste, didn't she?
R.C. Very good, the best. They were down near the flower beds. That was just when they were there in the summer. And by the time the birds ate a few of them, there wasn't very many left either, but those that you got are really very fragrant, you can smell them.
Q: Were there any apples, cherries, or plums?
R.C. No.
Q: No citrus?
R.C. No, it's kind of cold in that low ground there, citrus wouldn't do very well.
R.C. The pears had to be sprayed. They didn't produce much because the deer took care of them. There's a lot of deer in that valley. It's near Estudillo Street. And the water supply came from a property on Estudillo Street. That's where they had the big pumps. Water was pumped up to the

estate.
Q: That was lower, so it had to be pumped up.
R.C. Yes. And they had a gardener there, that just grew the vegetables, and his name was Tony. And he grew beautiful vegetables; that's all he did. Just planted seed and grew the vegetables for the house.
Q: There were no vegetable gardens up here?
R.C. No. I don't remember Tony's last name, but Albert Bonfonti would. His father was about the same age as that Tony. But I don't remember.
Q: Were most of the gardeners Portuguese? You said that Mr. Fenton was English.
R.C. Most of them were Italian. Italians and Portuguese.
Q: Were the vegetables brought up to the house?
R.C. Yes, they'd go down in the truck and bring them up. They supplied the family, and the help. There were always nice fresh vegetables for everyone. And she had the chef, and then there was a cook for the help. And everybody always had plenty. Nice fresh vegetables.

Q: Did you cook for your family?
R.C. I did, but when I was staying up there, working there, I had lunch with them. But after I left, I maintained my home.
Q: And did they provide vegetables for you?
R.C. We could have all the vegetables that we wanted. When we were living there, not when we were in our own home. But when we were caretakers, we were provided with all the fruits and vegetables and eggs.
Q: And you had that same water supply?
R.C. Yes.

Q: (returning to map) So you don't remember any arbors there?
R.C. There were little bridges that they had, one to go over to the Dinkelspiels' house. There was a little bridge; maybe that's what they mean.
Q: That was an interesting period of your life, wasn't it?
R.C. It was, very very nice. I enjoyed it. And we had so much room there that when we left there, I also had to

have a lot of room so when we moved here, we had 15 acres. And I have disposed of most of it now. I still own two cares of land. Which is plenty for me to enjoy. I enjoy the privacy that I have. And we have little wild rabbits, and the quail, and so I still enjoy the outdoors.

Q: What made you decided to move to Martinez?

R.C. To start the nursery. And the climate is nice here, and the people in town here are very nice. It's a small town; everybody knows everyone. And we started with really nothing; this was just a farmhouse with a huge barn. And we converted half the barn to a little store where we could sell our merchandise. And from there, the freeway came along and took nine acres of the land, and then we built that small store there. And since we discontinued the nursery, I converted that into a little dwelling. It's a nice little house to live in.

My husband passed away in 1968, but I still live the same way. I pl ant my own vegetables and I can them and I freeze them . I have just a little bit of everything. I take care of my trees and spray them, and I just love it.. I mean it's my life. And different ones say, "You shouldn't be working like that!" And I say, I'm not really working, I'm doing what I enjoy doing! Let's face it, you know, to some people, this would be a lot of work, and if I considered it work, it'd be a lot of work, but to me, it's more fun than it is work. And I just look forward to planting all my own things and having all my own fresh things. I even have chickens out there, and my own fresh eggs. I never got over the habit of having fresh things.

Q: You don't have to worry about reading the labels on everything!

R.C. No, no preservatives! My daughter lived with me after she was separated from her husband. Her children, one was three and the other was five. And the girl is now married and has a child, and the boy is in the Navy. So we're together. The son is living at home though; he's home every night. And she helps me, she helps me a great deal out here.

~~Q: Were ther~~ :

Q: Were there lilacs at Dunsmuir?
R.C. No, they don't cut good, they don't hold up.
Q: Everything was designed for cutting, wasn't it?
R.C. Yes, all the flowers that they grew were for decorating the house.
Q: The garden didn't have a great deal of color then?
R.C. Well, a little bit of color. Like the tree roses were near the house, and then they had probably a few pansies underneath, for the summer, when they were there. Because in the winter time, no one was there.

They had the laundry people who stayed there all the year round. They did the laundry. The laundry would come, whenthey'd take the vegetables to the city. They'd bring the ;aundry to be done. Here, in the basement. They had a huge basement, and a Japanese couple that lived there the year round. And they'd do the laundry for the house, and when they went away, to the city. Now whether they did it for all of them there, I don't know. But for Mrs. Hellmann's place. I heard that they did her work.
Q: But really it wasn't lived in for most of the year?
R.C. No, just for about a month and a half in the summer. At most, two months. When the children got out of school. Warren had a little girl named Catherine. Frederick had two adopted girls, Louise and Marjorie. And Marco, I don't know. And they would all move in at one time.
Q: So in the winter, it was just a matter of keeping it up?
R.C. Yes, just keeping it up so there wouldn't be any vandalism. They'd cover everything down for the winter, and then in the spring, before they moved, the help would come out and arrange the house again.
Q: You had the same crew all through the year?
R.C. Oh, yes. And they were workers; I mean that is a big house!
Q: It was an entirely different kind of living from what most of us know anything about, wasn't it?
R.C. Oh yes, but like I say, I'd like my own way of living! You have so many things that you have to do whether you want to or not, sort of an obligation. First they go, and then the others come. But it was interesting, to see all those

beautiful cars, and the chauffeurs. They'd let their passengers out, and then they'd go to the carriage house and wait until they were through, and then they;d give a call, on the phone, and they'd all go up and pick up their little charges, and take them home. (Laughs)

Q: Is there anything else that you think you'd like to taLK ABOUT? What about the inside of the house? You wore a uniform, I suppose?
R.C. Yes, a white uniform during the day. And if I helped serve the dinner, then I wore black. I did that once only because they didn't have enough help. And the laundress did all the laundry for the uniforms too.
Q: So you went up there at what time?
R.C. About nine in the morning.
Q: Do you remember anything about the furnishings?
R.C. Well, I don't remember too much. I remember the billiard room, that was in back, where the billiard tables were. And then they had the green room, that was on the left hand side of the house. And then there was the entrance hall and the library, and then the dining room, and the butler's pantry where they had all the dishes and things. And he set the table and fixed everything just to perfection.
Q: Who was the butler?
R.C. His name was Ross, a tall Englishman. And then the chef's name was Victor. He was a French chef. They'd come back and forth with the family.
Q: What color was the dining room?
R.C. They had a marble table by the window, and that had always beautiful big bouquets of flowers. And it was in dark walnut shades.
Q: Did they have the flowers in colors to go with the rooms?
R.C. Yes, the flowers in one room would have to be all one kind of flower, and in another room would be another kind. You couldn't mix the flowers. If they were gladiolas, they'd all be gladiolas in that room. And if they were dahlias, they were all dahlias. You couldn't mix them. They had to be alike., They were beautiful flowers. You see those chrysanthemums in the picture, how huge they were.

R.C. And then they had the Peruvian lilies, which were beautiful flowers.
Q: What color flowers did they use in the dining room; do you remember?
R.C. I think mostly yellow.
Q: Did she have flowers in her bedroom?
R.C. No.
Q: What color in the living room?
R.C. Well, usually they had gladiolas. And if they didn't have nice flowers, they had to g o out and buy flowers. If they weren't nice enough, they'd go to a nursery that grew cut flowers, and got the flowers there. Not often. Well, one day she called Ben to talk to him about the flowers. He said, "Madame, I have dahlias and some -- what else was it, I forget now, -- but he had two different types of flowers. And he says, I'll have them ready and picked and you can see them and see if you like them. And so she went down and she said, "Ben, those aren't nice enough."
So he went down to the flower shop and bought some flowers and brought them back, and he showed them to her, and she said, "You know, I think ours are better." (Laughs.) I think ours are better. Because all those people had estates and they all had gardeners and they were competetive with their flowers. "My gardener is a lot better, he does, this," (laughs) . And so she was just wanting to -- it was always a race, yes. They had to be just the top. So if they weren't nice enough, she'd say, We'd better go get some other flowers," and he'd go get them. But she said, "I think ours are better." So that made him feel good. Twice a week, they had the flowers.
Q: Who were some of the other estate owenrs?
R.C. The lady that had the Filoli gardens. I went to see that, but I like the Hellmannn house better. But I think their gardens (Filoli) are larger. They have more beautiful hedges, and Irish yews, and lots of camellias. But that's a better climate. But I forget her name. She's living, but all the Hellmanns are passed on now except one grand-daughter. Her grandson was killed in an accident skiing. Time goes on.

R.C. One day she said to my husband, "Ben, how would you like to have all this?" And he said, "No, thank you." (Laughs.) No, thank you. It took a lot of energy and sometimes the help doesn't get along and there's a lot of discord and then you have to keep them in harmony, and that's difficult. And when you're just a little person like us, you don't have any problems like that. We do our own, and if you don't do it today you do it tomorrow. And that's what I say, I was always wondering, and I'd like to see how those type of people live, and I just like my little small way better. More freedom and more peace of mind.

When you experience different things in life, then you can understand and value what you have. Because if people don't see, and don't know, they always think it's so wonderful to have all this and have all that, and it's not that way at all. I just have my little small home here, and I have so much freedom, I can go and come, and I don't have to worry about anybody. I'll do it myself, and if I don't do it, it's okay too. My time is my own, and her time wasn't her own. She just had to do these things at certain times.

Her husband passed away young, and she never remarried. When we got there she was already alone. She wore a lot of white. She was very kind. All of her help got a turkey for Thanksgiving, and she was very good.

Q: The brochure says, Mrs. Hellmann's favorites were Ophelia roses.
R.C. I don't know anything about those. We never grew any poinsettias, nor mushrooms. The roads were all black-top. There was some wisteria by the big house. There were no almonds when we were there. Paths were all blak-top. There was no golf course, unless it was the 5-acre piece of lawn where they had the picnic. They could have had a golf course there.
Q: Were there begonias?
R.C. No.

Q; What about the helpers? Who were they?

R.C. One of them was Jimmy Valerga. He's passed on. They were all old employees that were there with Mr. Fenton, and they stayed on. My husband did hire a boy for the summer to drive the horses, and help with extra work/. Johnny would come in. And then he hired Louie Tejeda after school. He'd come in and do chores.

One day the horses got away from Johnny, they were frightened, and they ran down all over the village, and we were scared to death, we didn't know where the horses were, so Ben had to get in the truck and go to locate them. They just got frightened, and they took off. And Johnny came back all upset...He didn't know where they were.

R.C. We took care of the dog also. He was a little Springer spaniel. We enjoyed having him around. He stayed all year round.

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